

## **Education in Remote and Isolated Areas in Japan**

In most of the countries in the world, the condition of education in remote and isolated area has been unfavorable. In many cases, school buildings and equipment are poor and cultural and traffic conditions are at a disadvantaged. Most of good, qualified teachers prefer to work in urban areas; while the teachers who stay in such areas are isolated. Small schools have to adopt multi-grade teaching. In addition to problems accessing the schools, the quality of education offered in such schools could not to be compared to that in urban areas. In Japan, from the 1950s, the government and educators started a national commitment improving the inferior state of education in remote and isolated areas. In 1954, the Law for the Promotion of Education in Remote and Isolated Areas was enacted. Under this specific law, some compensatory measures were introduced to promote education in such areas, and a serious effort has been sustained to reduce the disparities in education between isolated and non-isolated areas.

### **1. National campaign for promoting education in remote and isolated areas**

From the geographic point of view, Japan is an island country and also a mountainous country. Almost three-quarters parts of the country consists of areas that stand 200 meters above sea level. A great majority of the population lives densely in some limited plain (Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Fukuoka etc.). Traditionally, Japanese farmers were tempted to pioneer the uncultivated mountainous areas. There are many sparsely populated rural and isolated areas. Around the main islands, there are also some 400 small islands that have islanders.

Since the latter part of the 19th century, Japan had strived to expand schools even in those inconvenient areas. In 1902, the net enrollment rate of primary education had reached 90%. There were 27,154 primary schools that year, almost as many as we have today. Japan had achieved universal primary education in the early part of the 20th century including the remote and isolated areas. However, the problems of poor quality rural schools were left unsolved for a long time.

In the 1950s, Japan began to put in serious efforts to tackle educational problems in remote and isolated areas. The teachers who worked in rural and remote areas were the most vocal in pressing for the improvement of education in those schools. In 1951, they called “a national conference for studies on single-class schools and multi-grade schools.” Many teachers from schools in isolated areas in all parts of the country came together. In 1952, at the second national conference at which more than 2,000 teachers assembled, the National Association for the Study of Education in Remote and Isolated Areas (*Zenhekiren*) was established.

With the supports from the local governments, they developed a nation-wide campaign aimed at enacting a new law to promote education in isolated areas and to strengthen the national

subsidies for rural schools. They appealed to the newspapers and radios on the serious conditions of their schools and made petitions to the Diet members. As a result of the efforts of interested persons and stakeholders, in 1954, the Law for the Promotion of Education in Remote and Isolated Areas (*Hekichi kyōiku sinkōhō*) was formally enacted.

## **2. Measures and policies introduced by the Promotion Law**

Since the Promotion Law was enacted following the fulfillment of universal primary and junior secondary education, its objectives were principally aimed at improving the quality or educational standard of those schools. The Promotion Law defines the schools in remote and isolated areas as “those public primary and junior-secondary schools that are located in mountainous areas, remote islands or other similar areas which are badly served by communications and where the natural, economic or cultural conditions are unfavorable.” In accordance with prescribed criteria that are provided in the law, applicable schools are designated as “schools in remote and isolated areas.” Designated schools are treated as objects of special affirmative measures.

Criteria to calculate the degree of remoteness and isolation of the schools were established as follows.

### Mountainous area version (main elements)

1. Distance from a train station or a bus stop
2. Distance from a medical institution
3. Distance from a senior high school
4. Distance from a post office
5. Distance from the office of the local board of education

### Island version

1. Distance from the main land
2. Frequency of monthly scheduled service of the ship
3. Distance from a harbor

Other elements concerning the infrastructures of the schools and topographical features were also taken into consideration.

The Law provides the roles and functions of each level of administration for promoting education in such areas. For the Ministry of Education, two main functions are prescribed. One is promoting research activities on education in remote and isolated areas and the other is providing state subsidies to reinforce infrastructures in such schools. In the former field, the Ministry of Education executes such activities as a) designating pilot schools for study of multi-grade teaching, b) holding an annual national conference for the study of education in rural and isolated areas, c) providing training courses for leading personnel in the area of

education in remote and isolated area, d) making a teacher's guide for multi-grade teaching, and e) issuing a special journal and newspaper on rural education.

From 1954 to 1966, the Ministry of Education made up the teacher's guides for multi-grade teaching in primary schools. Parallel to this work, in 1967, the Ministry authorized textbooks in science and mathematics that were edited especially for multi-grade teaching classes. Also during a 30 years period (1959-1971), the Ministry issued a particular journal on education in remote and isolated areas (three issues in a year) and distributed them to the local boards of education and every designated school. In this journal, various articles and study reports on education in remote and isolated areas were widely distributed. The Ministry subsidized a special newspaper that was compiled by the National Association for Study of Education in Remote and Isolated Areas and distributed it for free to every designated school. At its peak, the newspaper had a circulation of 13,000.

At the beginning, state subsidies were provided for constructing such facilities as multi-purpose halls in rural schools, teachers lodging, and provisional teacher-training institutions for rural schools. The central government subsidized half of the building cost of these facilities. And state subsidies were gradually extended to providing such services as school buses, school boats, generators, televisions, health-care service, school-lunches, water-supply facilities, school baths, boarding houses, and traffic expenses.

Local education authorities fulfill proper functions respectively. Prefectural boards of education perform such activities as a) promoting research and study on proper teaching methods, materials, and teaching aids for rural schools, b) assuring opportunities for in-service training, c) establishing provisional teacher-training institutions for providing enough teachers for isolated areas, d) paying special allowances for teachers who work in disadvantaged areas, e) considering special treatment in allocation of teaching staff in rural areas, and f) providing adequate advice and support to the municipalities.

Municipal boards of education fulfill such functions as a) preparing teaching materials for schools in rural and isolated areas, b) constructing lodging for teachers in rural areas, c) providing health care service for students and teachers, e) securing the attending means to schools, and e) building multi-purpose halls in small schools.

Designated schools are classified into five grades according to the points of the remoteness. And teachers who work in such schools receive a special allowance of between 8 and 25 percent of their salary depending on the classified grade of their schools.

Table 1 shows the situation of Japanese rural and isolated schools in 1960. A large number of schools were designated in Hokkaido, Iwate, Niigata, Kouchi, Kagoshima and Aomori. At sole

in Hokkaido (the northern island), more than 2,000 small schools were designated.

Table 1. Number and type of the designated schools in 1960

	Primary School (%)	Junior Secondary School (%)
Designated schools	6,607 (24.6%)	2,712 (20.9%)
Number of students	827,071 (6.6%)	268,116 (4.5%)
Number of teachers	33,819 (9.4%)	14,447 (7.0%)
Type of multi-grade class		
Class consists of 2 grades	8,626	665
Class of 3 grades	3,146	21
Class of 4 grades	191	—
Class of 5 grades	8	—
Class of all grades	322	557
Total number	12,293	1,222

In some teacher-education institutions, research activities on the education in rural and isolated areas were launched. In the 1950s, in some schools attached to the school of education in national universities, experimental multi-grade classes were established to study the teaching methods for small rural schools. In 1954, a “Research center for education in rural and isolated areas” was established in a national university of education in Hokkaido.

On the other hand, since 1956, in Japan, local education authorities adopted the rotating system in teacher personnel administration. As a result of this measure, public school teachers could not stay for a long time at one school. Teachers transfer every 5 to 10 years within a municipality or municipalities. The rotation system of teachers is generally based on the following principles as a) exchanging teachers between isolated and populous areas, b) securing an appropriate mix in the composition of the teaching force in respect to their ages, gender, and experiences, and c) every teacher has to experience rural schools at least once or twice during his/her teaching career. The rotation system contributed to redress the balance of teaching staff between schools.

### 3. Reducing the class-size and excluding heavy multi-grade teaching classes

Since the 1960s, the Japanese government has strived to reduce the teacher-pupil ratio in the classroom. The maximum number of students in one classroom in primary and junior secondary schools has progressively decreased. The maximum number of pupils in the multi-grade class was prescribed to be smaller than that of the regular classroom. At the same time, as for the multi-grade teaching class, heavy multi-grade patterns that are the classrooms that are composed of more than three grades have been gradually excluded. Table 2 shows the shifting of the criteria for the maximum number of pupils in one classroom in Japanese schools.

Table 2. Changing of the criteria for the maximum number of pupils in one classroom

Year		1958	1963	1969	1974	1980	1993
Primary School	Normal classroom	50	45	45	45	40	40
	Class consists of 2 grades	35	25	22	20	18	16
	Class of 3 grades	35	25	15	—	—	—
	Class of 4 or 5 grades	30	25	—	—	—	—
	Class of all grades	20	15	—	—	—	—
Junior Secondary School	Normal classroom	50	45	45	45	40	40
	Class consists of 2 grades	35	25	15	12	10	8
	Class of all grades	30	25	—	—	—	—

In primary schools, in 1969, multi-grade teaching classes that consist of more than four grades are prohibited. In 1974, multi-grade teaching classes that consist of three grades are also prohibited. Now, in Japan, there exist only multi-grade classes that consist of two different grades.

In 1970, adapting to changing conditions in rural and isolated areas, the criteria for calculating the grade of remoteness and isolation were revised. By the revised criteria, the number of designated school increased by 1,300.

#### 4. Overcoming the “problem” of education in remote and isolated areas

Through a serious effort to overcome desperate conditions in education in rural and isolated areas under the Promotion Law, until the middle of the 1980s, the problems of schools in isolated areas have almost dissolved. In 1982, in the ceremony celebrating the 30th anniversary of the National Association for the Study of Education in Rural and Isolated Areas, the president of the association declared that in mountainous areas and remote islands we can now provide the same kind of education that is offered in urban areas. The infrastructure of schools in rural and isolated areas and the quality of education offered at these schools have improved remarkably. From then on, we stopped regarding the education in these schools as “a serious problem.” In the nation-wide scholastic achievement test that is carried out every year, we do not recognize any meaningful difference between schools that are located in remote and isolated areas and other schools.

The Promotion Law is in effect. Even today, a good number of schools are designated to this category. Teachers who work at these schools receive a special allowance. In the 2010 Revised Criteria, new elements such as the distance from a financial institution and distance from a supermarket were introduced. And at the schools that lack broadband service and mobile phone signals, additional points are given.

Table 3. Number of the designated schools in 2011

	Primary School (%)	Junior Secondary School (%)
Designated schools	2,497 (11.5%)	1,139 (10.6%)
Number of students	130,013 (1.9%)	65,685 (1.8%)
Number of teachers	20,346 (4.9%)	12,232 (4.8%)

## 5. Final comments

To sum up, Japan's approach to the problems of education in rural and isolated areas seemed to be successful. It may be attributed to the following reasons:

- a) The teachers who worked in isolated areas were the most vocal and active in leading the enactment of the Promotion Law.
- b) It has worked out the objective criteria for identifying rural and isolated schools and revised it at some intervals.
- c) Japan has adopted comprehensive policies to tackle the rural school problems. It was not a patchwork approach.
- d) Along with the affirmative actions to improve the infrastructures and working conditions at these schools, it has promoted the development of proper pedagogical approaches at those schools.
- e) It has adopted the rotation system in teacher personnel administration to exchange and redress the balance of teaching staff between schools.

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## 日本のへき地教育（記述の要点）

日本では、最近では、教育界、マスコミ等で「へき地教育」が話題にされることはほとんどない。もちろん、へき地と呼ばれる地域やへき地校に指定される学校が解消されたわけではない。しかしながら、今日ではへき地での教育が「深刻な問題」であるとの認識は少なくなっている。へき地住民であるがゆえに、教育上、著しく不利な状態に置かれるという状況はほぼ解消されていると言えよう。日本は、へき地における教育問題の緩和、解消にいかに取り組んできたのか。ここでは、主として1980年代までの取り組みを報告する。

### 1. わが国の国土環境と学校の普及

自然的地理的条件において、日本は、全国土の70%以上が標高200メートル以上の山岳地帯である。国土利用の状況で見ると、全土の68%は森林であり、東京、京都、大阪、福岡など人口密度が高く産業の集中している都市地域は国土の14%ほどにすぎない。一方、四方を海に囲まれた島国である日本には島や半島が多い。海岸線の周囲100m以上の島は約6,800あり、1950年代の統計ではそのうち400ほどには人が住む。こうした地域を含めて明治時代末までには、初等学校の普及がほぼ完成していた。戦後の義務教育化された中学校も、1950年までにはほぼ完全普及していた。しかし、この時まで、へき地の教育に関してなんらかの特別措置がとられることはなかった。

### 2. へき地教育振興法の制定

昭和29年のへき地教育振興法以降、へき地の教育の改善に関する本格的な取り組みが開始される。同法は、さまざまな指標を設けて学校が存在する地域のへき地度、遠隔度を算出し、それに基づいてへき地校を指定し、へき地校の教育環境の改善のために国、県、市町村がそれぞれのレベルで取り組むべき課題と役割を明確にした。へき地校の学校インフラの拡充、教員人事や研修制度の整備の研究が推進された。

### 3. 振興策の実施と効果

国は、へき地校の学校インフラ整備のために特別の国家補助を行うとともに、へき地校の複式学級における学習指導法や教材の開発をめざして、①へき地教育研究指定校の設置、②へき地教育指導者講座、③全国へき地教育研究大会の開催、④複式学級学習指導計画例の作成、⑤「へき地教育」誌の刊行などを行った。また、複式学級の定員の削減を推進し、1975年以降は三つの学年以上で構成される複式学級(重複式学級)を停止した。

### 4. へき地教育問題の解消

へき地教育振興法の制定から約30年が経過した1980年代初頭までには、へき地校における教育は大きく改善され、一般校と比べても教育上の格差はほとんど見られなくなってきた。最近の学力調査でも、へき地校と一般校との間で児童生徒の学業成績にはほとんど差は見られない。